

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
Department of History and Art History

HIST. 389-00-014: Tuesdays, 7:20-10:00 pm, Robinson B122

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Office hours: before class and by appointment

The California Gold Rush.

Although a short-lived and relatively contained event in the late 1840s and early 1850s, the gold rush had a substantial impact on many aspects of nineteenth century U.S. development, including demographics, economics, environment, mining and other technology, communications, transportation and politics. It was a founding event in what became the most populous state in the country. It is also a rich case study in U.S. social and cultural history since in a very short period tens of thousands of middle and working class European-American men from the Eastern U.S. encountered and had to live with diverse cultures and races. The gold rush was an important, and disastrous, event in Native American history. The gold rush migrations were predominately of white men, which strongly affected the role of women, both those who stayed in the East with new responsibilities and power, and the few who went West with an altered role in a massively male society. In this volatile mixture of huge numbers of people on the move across an unknown country, one has a microcosm of many aspects of U.S. antebellum history that we will study in all its complexity. By the end of this course, I hope everyone will have a good understanding of the events of the gold rush and its role in mid-19th century American history, and how these events relate to the broader themes of social and cultural history.

Textbooks (all required)—other reading will be on reserve both print and e-reserve in the Johnson Center library, or available from web sites.

1. Malcolm Rohrbough, *Days of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
2. Susan Lee Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2000).
3. Richard Stillson, *Spreading the Word: A History of Information in the California Gold Rush* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

Readings on reserve: There are many reading assignments outside the three required texts; these are an integral part of the course and as important as assignments from the texts. Many of these readings are primary sources available on the web, and the syllabus gives hints on how to find them. There are also readings from electronic books and newspapers available through the library's web site, and others on the library's e-reserve. The **password** for the e-reserves for this course is "**49ers**."

The course has a page on Blackboard and I will post the syllabus, all handouts, and any extra material or websites that may be useful for the purposes of the course on Blackboard. For communications with me, other than face to face meetings, I prefer e-mail (rstillso@gmu.edu). Every student must use MASONLIVE e-mail accounts to receive University information and communications about the course.

Assignments:

There will be two exams given during the semester, a mid-term (20 percent of your grade) and a final (30 percent), and a research paper (50 percent). You can see that the research paper is the single most important part of your grade and it should be a substantial paper using primary and secondary sources. There is no required length, but to do a good job I would expect most papers to be around 15 to 20 pages, typed double spaced. The format and style should be consistent with the Chicago style manual (a useful short version is Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). Everyone must turn in a preliminary research proposal of about 2-3 pages by Tuesday, February 21 and a final proposal Tuesday, March 6. The preliminary proposal identifies what you hope to research, where you hope to find resources, and an brief description of why you chose that topic. I would like to see everyone about their ideas in the following week. The final proposal is a more detailed description of the project, the sources, and the connection of what you hope to show in your research to the grander themes of 19th century U.S. history. A draft is due by April 17 and I will go over it with each student in the following week. The final draft is due at the last class, on May 1. I will not accept your final paper unless you turn in an approved proposal and a preliminary draft.

I encourage questions and class discussion at all times. The old saying “the only dumb question is the one not asked” has become a cliché because it is true. We have a relatively small class and we should be able to have lively discussions. In addition, several times during the semester, I will choose a particular topic that will be the focus of a class discussion. I’ll announce the topic in the previous class session, usually a controversial aspect of the literature we are reading at the time. In order to help facilitate these discussions a one or two page paper about the topic will be required from each student and turned in at the end of the discussion. These are to be discussion notes to help you organize your thoughts about the topic before the discussion. These notes and participation in the discussions will not be specifically graded but they will sway your grade if you are in-between grades based on the research paper and the exams. Exam questions, all of which will be essay, will reflect the classroom discussions as well as the readings and lectures.

My lectures and our class discussions will cover material and ideas that are not in the readings so attendance in class is crucial to achieve the objectives of the course. I will take attendance from time to time and if I record unexplained absences it will affect your grade. If you cannot make a class please e-mail me with the reason and I can record an excused absence.

Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The department takes academic integrity very seriously and violations are treated gravely. Keep this in mind when researching and writing your paper. There is an element of judgment between relying on secondary sources and plagiarism. If you have any doubt about this in your paper, please come and see me and we’ll go over it.

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.

A few housekeeping notes: please no eating or drinking, and do not use pagers or cell phones during the class. Given the evening hours of the class, it may be difficult for some students to make my usual office time of roughly an hour before each class. If you can’t easily make this time, please make an appointment—I am reasonably free during the weekdays and will try to accommodate your schedules.

Websites

The internet contains hundreds of sites that provide primary and secondary material on the history of the United States. The history of the western U.S., including the California gold rush, is well represented. Many of these sites are valuable tools in studying and researching American history and you should take advantage of them in this course. It is crucial, however, that you do so with a critical eye; for historians, critical browsing has become as important as critical reading. All of the techniques of critical reading must be applied to historical web sites: who is the author and what is the context of the web site? Are there contradictions or inconsistencies with other things you have read about the subject of the web site? What is the selection process of the documentation provided on the web site? What has been left out? Since it is sometimes difficult to assess a website, stick to sites from federal and state governments, universities, libraries, archives and those listed below. Also, Google Books has many 19th century books on line so also use that for primary resources. Please, no Wikipedia. I have listed below a few web sites that I have found useful in my research on the gold rush and you may find useful doing your own research for the paper required for the course. Use the links to find many more relevant web sites. Enjoy them, they are fun and helpful, but use them with care.

The Library of Congress: great sources for primary and secondary materials.

California as I Saw It: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cbhtml/cbhome.html>

American Memory: <http://memory.loc.gov/>

Trail Sites: There are many of these and they are usually interesting and helpful. They are good sources for diaries and letters of goldrushers.

Oregon-California Trail Association (OCTA): This is the premier organization for trail buffs, and it has a great web site: <http://www.octa-trails.org>.

Trails to Utah and the Pacific: Diaries and Letters, 1846-1869: This site from Brigham Young University is a wonderful collection of trail diaries and images. It won an award from the Library of Congress: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award99/upbhtml/overhome.html>

The National Park Service has a good historical web site and their books and handbooks are digitized and on line: <http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/>

Maps: maps are a crucial tool for studying the gold rush and we will use them intensively in the course. There are several superb web sites from which maps can be viewed and usually be downloaded.

University of Texas Library has a large digitized map collection highlighting western American history: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/histus.html>

The David Rumsey Historical Map Collection focuses on 18th and 19th century North and South American maps. It is one of the best collection of historical maps on the web, including digital copies of some that goldrushers actually used. Click on the "insight browser" and use the search feature to identify maps of California and the gold rush: <http://www.davidrumsey.com/add111501.htm>.

Class Schedule:

<u>Day/Date</u>	<u>Primary Topics and Readings</u>
Tuesday, Jan 24:	Plan for the course; Introduction: What was the gold rush and why it is useful to study it. The historical context.
Tuesday Jan. 31:	A synopsis of the events of the gold rush. Getting the word out--newspapers.
<u>Readings:</u>	Rorhborgh, Introduction and chapters 1 and 2; Stillson, Introduction and chapter 1. Find newspaper articles from December 1848 about the gold rush (hint, go to Fenwick web page and click on research databases, and then use search box).
Tuesday, Feb. 7:	Guidebooks and maps; information, and communications. The research paper.
<u>Readings:</u>	Stillson, Chapter 2; Rorhbough, Chapter 3; Edwin Bryant, <i>What I Saw in California</i> , chapters 1 and XV (hint, go to Google Books and search for it); Joseph Ware, <i>The Emigrants' Guide</i> , Introduction and Chapters 1-2. (e-reserve)..
Tuesday, Feb. 14	The trip by sea—around the Horn or through Panama. Focused class discussion (topic to be announced in the previous class).
<u>Readings:</u>	Rorhborgh, pp. 55-61; Roberts, pp. 92-117 (e-books); Bayard Taylor, <i>El Dorado</i> , Chapters 1-4 (try Google books again); J. Ross Browne, <i>His Letters, Journals and Writings</i> , pp. 63-84, 104-117 (e- reserve).
Tuesday, Feb. 21	Preliminary research proposals due. The trip by land--first get to Missouri. Across the country by wagon. Decisions and dangers.
<u>Readings:</u>	Stillson, Chapters 3 and 4. Holliday, <i>The World Rushed In</i> , pp. 60-85 (e-reserve).
Tuesday, Feb. 28	Focused class discussion (be prepared to talk about your research proposal). Review for the midterm.
<u>Readings:</u>	Scamehorn, Banks, and Lytle-Webb, <i>The Buckeye Rovers</i> , pp. 8-90 (e-reserves).
Tuesday, March 6	Final research paper proposals due. Midterm exam, one hour.
March 12 – 16 is Spring Break. This is the chance to get a head start on your research paper.	

Tuesday, March 20 Review of mid-term; California, finally.
Life in the diggings.

Readings: Stillson, Chapter 5;
Rorhbaugh, Chapters 8 and 9;
Johnson, Chapter 2.

Tuesday, March 27 A dangerous and diverse society.

Readings: Johnson, chapters 1 and 4;
Star and Orsi, *Barbarous Soil*, Chapter 3 (e- reserve).

Tuesday, April 3 Focused class discussion (topic to be announced)
What happened to the Indians?

Readings: Johnson, Prologue;
Starr and Orsi, *Barbarous Soil*, Chapter 4 (e-reserve);
Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier*, chapter 6 (e-reserve)

Tuesday, April 10 A lot of lonely men.
Gold rush women, East and West.

Readings: Rohrbough, Chapters 6 and 7;
Johnson, Chapter 3.
Starr and Orsi, *Barbarous Soil*, Chapter 6 (e-reserve).

Tuesday, April 17 **Draft research proposal due.**

Focused class discussion (be prepared to talk about your papers)
From placers to big business; from mining camps to cities.

Readings: Rohrbough, chapters 10 and 13;
Star and Orsi, *Barbarous Soil*, chapter 5 (e-reserve);
Rawls and Orsi, *A Golden State*, Chapters 3 and 5 (e-books).

Tuesday, April 24 Change comes to California—the 1850s.
The end of the gold rush.

Readings: Stillson, Chapter 6;
Rorhbaugh, Chapters 17 and 18;
Johnson, Chapters 5 and 6.

Tuesday, May 1 **Last Class—Research Paper due.**

Remembering the gold rush
Review for the final.

Readings: Rohrbough, Chapter 19;
Stillson, Conclusion;
Johnson, Epilog.

Tuesday, May 15 **Final Exam**, 7:30 PM, two hours.